

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2251

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 8366

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, US

SUBJECT: SECOND MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS

REF: (A) STATE 268703, (B) BEIRUT 8363

1. SUMMARY. IN A ONE AND A HALF HOUR DISCUSSION WITH CHARGE NOV 8, PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID HE INTENDS FIRST TO ESTABLISH SECURITY, THEN FORM A NEW CABINET, AND THEN PROCEED WITH RECONSTRUCTION AND DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING A NEW POLITICAL FORMULA AND A NEW ARMY. HE SAID USG COULD ASSIST HIM BY USING ITS INFLUENCE WITH KEY ARAB STATES TO ENCOURAGE THEIR PRESENT COHESIVE POLICY TOWARDS LEBANON, AND BY ENCOURAGING THE LEBANESE PARTIES TO REACH A COMPROMISE. END SUMMARY.

2. CHARGE MET WITH GOL PRESIDENT SARKIS FOR APPROXIMATELY HOUR AND A HALF ON MONDAY, NOV 8, AT PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IN BAABDA. SARKIS SAID HE HAD BEEN CAREFULLY CONSIDERING POINTS MADE BY CHARGE IN THEIR INITIAL MEETING NOV 5 (REF B) AND HAD FOLLOWING COMMENTS:

3. RESULTS OF RIYADH SUMMIT. THE RIYADH SUMMIT HAD PRODUCED INCREASING COHESION AMONG CERTAIN ARAB STATES THAT HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. THESE STATES, SAUDI ARABIA, EGYPT, KUWAIT AND SYRIA, CAN CONTINUE TO PLAN IMPORTANT

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ROLE IN SOLUTION OF LEBANESE CRISIS FOR

FOLLOWING REASONS: (1) BECAUSE OF SUPPORT THEY GIVE PALESTINIANS--FINANCIAL IN THE CASE OF SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT, AND MORAL IN CASE OF EGYPT. IT WAS THESE STATES THAT HAD PUT PRESSURE ON WEST IN '73 TO HELP PLO GET INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION. (2) BECAUSE THESE STATES HAVE FRIENDS WITHIN LEBANON ON BOTH MOSLEM AND CHRISTIAN SIDES, THEY ARE THEREFORE IN POSITION TO USE THESE CONTACTS TO PROMOTE A SOLUTION IN LEBANON IN ACCORDANCE WITH DECISIONS OF THE RIYADH SUMMIT. PRESIDENT SARKIS HOPED THAT U.S. COULD ASSIST IN REINFORCING THE COHESION AMONG THESE KEY COUNTRIES, BOTH FOR SAKE OF A SOLUTION IN LEBANON AND BECAUSE SUCH COHESION WAS ESSENTIAL IF THERE IS TO BE SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM AS A WHOLE IN A FORTHCOMING GENEVA CONFERENCE.

4. THE ARAB SECURITY FORCE (ASF). SARKIS SAID THE ASF MUST IMPOSE ITSELF ON ALL THE PROTAGONISTS, BY FORCE IF NECESSARY, TO ASSURE AN END OF HOSTILITIES. IF FORCE MUST BE USED AGAINST PALESTINIAN SIDE, THERE MAY BE ARAB REACTION FROM SUCH COUNTRIES AS IRAQ, LIBYA AND ALGERIA. THESE REACTIONS MUST BE NEUTRALIZED. SARKIS RECOGNIZED THAT U.S. HAS LITTLE INFLUENCE IN IRAQ OR LIBYA, BUT SUGGESTED WE COULD PLAY A ROLE WITH BOUMEDIENE SHOULD NEED ARISE. HE ALSO SAID THAT IF THERE IS TROUBLE FROM CHRISTIAN SIDE, HE HOPED USG COULD USE ITS INFLUENCE WITH THEM. HE MENTIONED THAT ASF SHOULD BE MOVING IN A MATTER OF HOURS; HE HAD GIVEN COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF AL HAJJ THE NECESSARY ORDERS INSTRUCTING HIM TO MOVE WHENEVER IN HIS VIEW THE MILITARY PREPARATIONS WERE ADEQUATE. KUWAITI AIRLINES HAD AGREED TO BRING IN TROOPS FROM OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

5. THE REMOVAL OF HEAVY WEAPONS. PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID AGREEMENT HAD ALREADY BEEN REACHED ON REMOVAL OF HEAVY WEAPONS. EACH FIGHTING GROUP WAS TO DESIGNATE A PLACE WHERE IT INTENDED TO STORE ITS WEAPONS, PUT THEM THERE, AND THEY WOULD THEN

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BE GUARDED BY AN ASF CONTINGENT. HE SAID BOTH KATAEB AND PNL HAD AGREED TO THIS PROCEDURE, BUT DID NOT SAY WHEN IT WOULD BE CARRIED OUT.

6. THE POLITICAL PROBLEM. PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID THAT ONCE ASF FORCES ARE IN PLACE, AND SECURITY ESTABLISHED, THE LEBANESE PROBLEM WILL REACH A NEW STAGE IN WHICH UNITED STATES CAN ALSO PLAN AN IMPORTANT ROLE. LEBANESE

MUST REACH POLITICAL CONSENSUS, INCLUDING ESSENTIAL CHANGES, WITHOUT DESTROYING BASIC LEBANESE SYSTEM. HE REFERRED TO HIS INAUGURATION SPEECH, IN WHICH HE SAID THAT "AS FOR CHANGE, THE DOOR IS OPEN IN ALL FIELDS" EXCEPT LEBANON'S DESIRE TO RETAIN A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. HE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT "LEBANON IS AN EQUATION," THERE MUST BE A CONSENSUS, AND THE UNITED STATES, BY USING ITS INFLUENCE WITH VARIOUS PARTIES AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME, CAN HELP LEBANON TO ARRIVE AT THIS CONSENSUS.

7. THE NEXT STEPS. PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID THAT ONCE SECURITY HAD BEEN RESTORED, HIS NEXT STEP WOULD BE TO FORM A NEW COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, WHICH WOULD BE VERY LARGE IN ORDER TO ACCOMMODATE ALL POINTS OF VIEW AND GET ON WITH THE JOB OF RECONSTRUCTION. IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT A CONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSION OF LEBANON'S FUTURE POLITICAL STRUCTURE COULD TAKE PLACE IN THIS FORUM. IF NOT, A ROUND-TABLE CONFERENCE WOULD HAVE TO BE ARRANGED. PRESIDENT SARKIS MENTIONED POSSIBILITY OF DIVIDING COUNTRY INTO ELEVEN RATHER THAN PRESENT FIVE REGIONS, BUT OBVIOUSLY HAD NOT WORKED OUT ANY DETAILED PLAN OF HIS OWN FOR A NEW LEBANON. THE ESSENTIAL, HE SAID, IS A CONSENSUS WHICH DETRACTS LEAST FROM THE BASIC UNITY OF THE COUNTRY.

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EXDIS

8. U.S. POLICY. PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID IT WOULD BE USEFUL IF USG WERE TO RESTATE ITS POSITION IN FAVOR OF THE UNITY, INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

OF LEBANON. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WE HAD DONE SO SEVERAL TIMES RECENTLY, IN THE OFFICIAL DECLARATION OF SEPT 23 AND IN NUMEROUS STATEMENTS MADE BY THE SECRETARY SINCE THEN, BUT HE SAID THERE WERE STILL MANY PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED THE "PLOT" THEORY, THAT USG IS SOMEHOW CONSPIRING FOR PARTITION OF LEBANON FOR THE ULTIMATE BENEFIT OF ISRAEL. IT IS THEREFORE IMPORTANT FOR U.S.M TO CONSTANTLY RESTATE ITS POSITION WHENEVER AN APPROPRIATE OCCASION ARISES.

9. THE PALESTINAINS AND THE SOUTH. IN DISCUSSING THIS QUESTION, PRESIDENT SARKIS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT WAS A POTENTIAL PROBLEM, BUT SAID SEVERAL TIMES, "JE N'AVAIS PAS DE CHOIX." THE FUTURE PROBLEM OF LEBANON, HE SAID, IS PROBLEM OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE, EVEN DISARMED. HE SAID THERE WERE NO "SECRET CLAUSES" IN CAIRO ACCORDS. PALESTINIANS HAD THE RIGHT TO BE IN THE ARQUB AREA--NORTHEAST OF MARJAYUN ON SLOPES OF MT. HERMON--BUT NOT ALONG SOUTHERN BORDER FROM NAQURA TO BINT JIBAYL. SHOWING MORE EMOTION THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME DURING THE MEETING, SARKIS SAID LEBANON IS PAYING THE PRICE FOR NEGLECT OF PALESTINIAN PROBLEM BY INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES HAD BEEN EXTREMELY SEVERE WITH PALESTINIANS, AND MANY HAD THEREFORE COME TO
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LEBANON BECAUSE IT WAS A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. LEBANON HAS PAID AND IS PAYING MORE THAN ITS SHARE. IT SHOULD NOT BE ASKED TO PAY MORE. GIVEN PRESENT SITUATION, LEBANON CAN NO LONGER PAY THE SMALLEST PRICE TOWARD SETTLEMENT OF PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. U.S., HE SAID, MUST ASSURE THAT LEBANON DOES NOT HAVE TO PAY ANY MORE, BY PLAYING MAJOR ROLE IN ACHIEVING AN OVERALL SOLUTION TO MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM.

10. THE NEW LEBANESE ARMY. SARKIS SAID FIRST JOB OF NEW COUNCIL OF MINISTERS WILL BE TO FIND FORMULA FOR REBUILDING THE ARMY. AT PRESENT, THERE ARE FIVE FACTIONS: (1) THE LEBANESE ARMY UNDER HANA SA'ID; (2) THE LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS (THE MAJORITY) WHO HAD STAYED HOME AND TAKEN NO PART IN THE FIGHTING; (3) THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY OF LT. KHATIB; (4) THE VANGUARDS FORMED BY SYRIANS; AND (5) THE KATAEB AND PNL MILITIAS. SARKIS SAID HE HAD RECEIVED MANY SUGGESTIONS FOR REBUILDING OF A LEBANESE ARMY, BUT HE HAD NOT AT THIS POINT CHOSEN ONE PARTICULAR PLAN. HE IMPLIED THAT HE WOULD RELY ON ASF WHILE THIS QUESTION WAS BEING THRASHED OUT BY NEW COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

11. COMMENT: SARKIS APPEARED RELAXED AND CONFIDENT IN THIS SECOND MEETING. HE SEEMS FULLY AWARE OF WIDE DIVERGENCE OF VIEWS BETWEEN VARIOUS LEBANESE FACTIONS BUT OPTIMISTIC THAT WITH TIME, PATIENCE AND HELP OF THE ASF AND FRIENDLY COUNTRIES, INCLUDING U.S., HE WILL BE ABLE TO PRESIDE OVER SOME KIND OF RECONCILIATION. HIS TACTIC APPEARS TO BE NOT TO PRESENT DETAILED PLANS TO VARIOUS CONTENDING GROUPS, BUT TO LET A COMPROMISE EVOLVE FROM THE PROCESS OF DISCUSSION.

12. DEPT PLEASE PASS TO OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 NOV 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BEIRUT08366
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760417-0478
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761168/aaaacgxj.tel
Line Count: 237
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 STATE 268703, 76 BEIRUT 8363
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13 MAY 2004 by woolflhd>; APPROVED <13 SEP 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SECOND MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, US, (LANE, GEORGE), (SARKIS, ELIAS)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006